#### Child Protection Foundation Training

# Understanding the Dynamics of Nonoffending Caretakers in Child Sexual Abuse Cases



## **Core Competencies**

- Understand how cases of child sexual abuse can create a variety of reactions and responses with nonoffending caretakers
- Learn strategies for working with nonoffending caretakers that reduce trauma for the child victim and increase positive behaviors

# Looking to the Research

# Families' experiences during the investigation:

- Parental satisfaction with investigations appears to increase with the perceived supportiveness of the involved professionals and when they have good access to information about what is happening with the investigation and...
- When there is a greater sense of comfort and safety during the process families report a sense of trust and confidence for the investigative process

Jones et. al (2007) Do Children's Advocacy Centers improve families' experiences of child sexual abuse investigations? *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31 (10).

## Looking to the Research

# Families' experiences during the investigation:

- Additional research: 33% of caregivers expressed the need for more communication about their case, with more frequent information from DA
- Caregivers indicated they felt like they were "left hanging", "given little or no information about the case during the prosecutorial process" and were not clear why pleas to lesser charges were accepted to resolve the case.
- Families would rather receive an update informing them that there has been no movement in the case than hear nothing at all.

Bonach, K., Mabry, J., & Potts-Henry, C. (2010). Exploring Nonoffending Caregiver Satisfaction with a Children's Advocacy Center. Journal of Child Sector Abuse, 19, 687-708

## **Critical Aspects To Understand**

#### From their viewpoint:

- In terms of support for the child, 75% of the nonoffending caregivers supported their child when the offender was non-familial; only 11% when the offender was a family member
- The disclosure of sexual abuse is rarely the only problem in their lives....in one study, non-offending caregivers were also dealing with physical abuse (47%) exposure to DV (32%) and their own substance abuse issues (29%)

## **Critical Aspects To Understand**

#### From their viewpoint:

- Mothers report feeling as if they were guilty of something or that others saw them as "crazy".
- They report a sense of helplessness, feeling unprepared for the interventions and being incensed about the insensitivity shown to their victimized children.
- Many expressed that after abuse was substantiated, they expected justice would quickly follow and that they would be treated with concern and sensitivity.

#### **Critical Aspects to Understand**

NOC Types	PTSD	Believe & Support	Abuse History
Resilient (32.7%)	low	Believed & Protected	Low level
<b>Avoidant Coping</b> (32.7%)	moderat e	1/3 did not offer emotional support & no services	Lowest level
Traumatized (19.1%)	Complex PTSD	Adequate	Highest level of child maltreatment
<b>Anger-Oriented</b> <b>Reactive</b> (15.5%)	Highest level	Believed & Protected but angry and in conflict	Low

Cyr, M., McDuff P., & Hebert, M. (2013). Support and Profiles of Nonoffending Mothers of Sexually Abused Children. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 22, 209-230.

## **Critical Aspects To Understand**

#### Criteria to characterize as nonsupportive:

- Initially expressed disbelief or skepticism about the allegation(s)
- Exerted direct verbal pressure on the child to recant
- Blamed the child for the abuse
- Remained romantically or interpersonally involved with the abuser after CSA discovery

Malley, L. & Lyon, T. (2006) Caregiver Support and Child Sexual Abuse: Why does !- Matter? Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 15(4).

## **Critical Aspects to Understand**

#### From their Viewpoint:

"After Dave had his interview at the CAC, they called me into the room and they interviewed me. The police officer was very upset that Dave (age 4) knew what a penis was....He would continuously ask me the same question over and over again. It was awful....He just really tried to rattle me. I had the very strong opinion that he did not believe what I was telling him. It was sort of like another traumatic experience on top of finding out about the abuse. What happened there was so different from what I expected."

Plummer, C. & Eastin, J. (2007). System Intervention Problems in Child Sexual Abuse Investigations: The Mothers' Perspectives. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 22,6.

# The Positive Impact of Relationship Building

- Mothers who reported feeling supported during the investigation indicated much lower levels of anger, PTSD and depression
- Both child victims and their mothers have lower levels of depression when they feel as if professionals are supportive

Zajac, K.. Ralston, M.E., & Smith, D. (2015). Maternal Support following Childhood Sexual Abuse: Associations with children's adjustment post-disclosure and at 9-month follow up. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 44, 66-75.

# **Questions?**

